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ABSTRACT

Policies and practices associated with intra-district teacher transfers in urban school districts were examined, exploring the implications for educational equity of this aspect of teacher mobility. Human capital theory and the theory of internal labor markets and their institutional rules provided the primary theoretical focus of the research. Four urban districts were included in the study, districts in distinct areas of the United States in which teacher union activity and strength varied considerably. Respondents were 11 school administrators (3 secondary and 8 elementary), 1 former principal, 5 school district officials, 3 local union representatives, a former college of education dean, 4 college of education professors, and an education specialist with the local government. Data provide evidence that the problem of teacher transfer is often more complex than the literature usually indicates. Seniority-based transfer of teachers away from low-income schools is typically associated with union contract provisions. Internal labor market rules in the Northeastern and Midwestern school districts are largely governed by union contracts, and transfer patterns in the Northeastern city generally operate as predicted by earlier teacher mobility studies. However, the process of teacher transfers in the two Southeastern cities operates in less expected ways. In the smaller district, teachers regularly move from low to higher socioeconomic status schools, even in the absence of contract provisions allowing seniority-based transfer. In the other district, an emphasis on desegregation and efforts to give consideration to schools with the greatest needs appear to have contributed to a decline in the rate of transfer. Transfers of quality teachers out and ineffective teachers in often interfere with efforts to offer meaningful staff development, build a sense of mission, and foster a collegial atmosphere among the staff. (Contains 49 references.) (SLD)

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Teacher Transfer Policy and the Implications for Equity in Urban School Districts

The purpose of this article is to examine the policies and practices associated with intra-district teacher transfers in urban school districts and to explore the implications for equity of this aspect of teacher mobility. As access to quality teaching occupies an increasingly prominent place on the education policy agenda, it is important to address some of the underexamined dimensions of the issue. While disputes continue about the importance of school resources and definitions of quality teaching vary, most observers agree that effective, well-prepared teachers are among the primary factors that influence student achievement. Many problems related to teacher supply are receiving well-deserved attention. Among the concerns raised in recent years are teacher shortages (see, for example, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Murnane, Singer, Willet, Kemple & Olsen, 1992; Haycock, 1998; Sack, 2000), underqualified and out-of-field teaching (Oakes, 1990; Ingersoll, 1997; Ingersoll, 1999), improved pre-service preparation (see, for example, Ladson-Billings, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999), and minority recruitment and retention (see, for example, Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Kirby, Berends & Naftel, 1999). However, too little notice has been given to the problems attendant to the current policies, practices, and consequences of teacher transfer.

Researchers have long recognized transfers of experienced, well-qualified teachers away from schools with high concentrations of poverty as a problem in urban school districts in the United States (see, for example, Becker, 1952; Havighurst, 1967; Bruno & Doscher, 1981; Wise, Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1987; Krei, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1995). This situation continues because many cities have created "'islands' of quality education," and

these "have also functioned to increase class distinctions within city school systems" (Kantor and Brenzel, p. 292). This sort of dual system has resulted in some schools which serve the city's poor and others which serve the city's more affluent students (Kozol, 1991). Previous studies have indicated that in many urban areas there exist political and bureaucratic institutions and processes that essentially allow teachers to choose the schools in which they work. When the process is not regulated and teachers are given freedom to choose, many tend to make their decisions on the basis of the socioeconomic status of students, along with the level of resources and working conditions found in the school.

Little recent research has documented the ways that teacher transfer decisions are made in urban districts. As Banfield (1965) pointed out, "there is usually a good deal of difference between the ways things are supposed to be done and they way they actually are done in large cities," (p. 6). Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which school-level administrators, district officials, and teacher unions may work within existing official policy while using informal channels to manage the process of teacher transfer.

Teacher union contract provisions regarding seniority-based transfer policies are frequently cited as important in determining teacher assignment. Contract rules may involve provisions for transfer based on seniority only, seniority with other factors considered, seniority if all other qualified applicants are equal, or seniority with the final decisions left to the district (Johnson, 1984). Some schools must also consider federal requirements to balance staff by race while others may inherit teachers due to reductions in force. Additionally, teacher contracts and tenure rules in many urban districts make it difficult to remove "marginal" teachers from their jobs. Instead of dealing with the complex and time-

consuming process of dismissal, school officials sometimes resort to such tactics as transferring teachers from one school to another within their districts.

Teacher organizations have traditionally supported a teacher's right to a voluntary transfer (Grimshaw, 1979). "From the teacher's perspective, the opportunity to transfer to a 'better' school was one of the few rewards the system offered for years of competent service" (Murphy, 1990, p. 236). Evidence exists that these transferring teachers often may not be of satisfactory quality. In unpublished analyses of the High School and Beyond data set, poverty concentration was found to be positively associated with teacher turnover. Moreover, the number of teachers transferring to a school and teachers new to the school who are rated as excellent by principals is negatively and significantly correlated (Krei, 1993).

Teacher turnover can have a number of negative results for both students and working conditions in urban schools. When teaching staffs have high attrition rates, especially in areas where there is not a large supply of qualified teachers in the labor market, temporary substitutes and inexperienced teachers are often hired to fill the vacancies (see, for example, Kelley, 1987). This situation is believed to contribute to the low achievement levels so often found in low-income and minority schools (Darling-Hammond, 1995.).

Another of the negative results of high teacher turnover is the problem of staff development. If a school cannot maintain a relatively stable staff, it is difficult to foster collaborative relations and to find support for innovative programs and skill development (Louis, 1990). Frequent turnover may also contribute to disciplinary difficulties in schools. Because new teachers are often "tested" by students, it is easier to maintain classroom discipline once teachers get to know their students (Turney, et al., 1984; Chicago Panel on Public School Finance, 1984). High rates of teacher turnover can also be expected to make it

especially difficult to develop consensus on values and goals for a school and to foster a collegial atmosphere among faculty.

The issue of teacher transfer offers an important context in which to examine the general question of the ways in which political structures, bureaucratic practices, and socioeconomic factors contribute to inequitable opportunities to learn. This paper explores the policies and practices related to intra-district teacher transfers and examines how school-level poverty concentration is associated with these transfers. Among the key issues analyzed are the part that district office personnel and teacher unions play in setting transfer policy, the role of principals in teacher transfer, and the impact of the difficulties associated with rules for dismissal of unsatisfactory teachers. In addition, policy suggestions are offered to address the consequences of teacher transfer on equitable access to quality teaching in urban districts.

This research is not intended simply to provide further documentation to substantiate what most observers already know—that deplorable inequities exist among public schools and that teacher transfers often contribute to the problem. In Community Conflict (1957), Coleman stressed the importance of making explicit the patterns and providing "insights into the processes" and the "factors modifying the processes" which underlie community controversy. Using that approach, this inquiry is designed to explore official policy and unofficial practices governing teacher transfer in four urban districts.

Theoretical Framework

Human capital theory and the theory of internal labor markets and their institutional rules provide the primary theoretical focus for this research. Investments in human capital can make workers more productive for the employer, or they can enhance the ability of workers for their own benefit (Seidenberg, 1988). In their study of teacher attrition, Grissmer and

Kirby (1987) found human capital theory useful in explaining voluntary changes of employment. Their findings suggest that, as teachers acquire occupation-, location-, and firm-specific human capital, they are less likely to change careers or to leave the school districts or buildings where they are employed. Greenberg and McCall (1974) used human capital and internal labor market theories to analyze teacher mobility in San Diego city schools over a two-year period. They found that investments in specific human capital inhibited movement within the district because such investments "partition the educational labor market into relatively autonomous submarkets—that is internal labor markets" (p. 482). The first level is the entire teaching sector, an external labor market made up of all existing teaching jobs. The second is the school district level. The third is an internal labor market at the individual school level.

Greenberg and McCall (1974) suggest that, as teachers increase their general human capital relative to the education sector and to their school district, they are less likely to either change occupations or to leave their districts. Moreover, teachers with large investments in specific human capital in a single school are less likely to transfer to another school within their district. They also point out that, within school districts, salary level is usually attached to the teacher rather than to the job. Various nonpecuniary considerations can make one school assignment preferable to another. Teachers were predicted to prefer schools which rank high on factors such as student socioeconomic status. Schools which have many low SES students were predicted to have high turnover rates because, as newer teachers assigned to these schools built up the required investment in human capital (i. e., seniority), they would request transfers to higher SES schools.

In an analysis of movement within SES sectors in the San Diego public schools, Greenberg and McCall (1973) found that the probability of staying in one's initial SES subsector between school years is greater than the probability of moving. However, they conclude that, when teachers do transfer within district, the probability of moving from a low to a high SES school is almost four times greater than a transfer in the opposite direction. Internal labor market conditions and political structures may constrain the consumption of human capital, however (Murnane, 1981). For example, in times of declining enrollment and job reduction, a teacher may find it necessary to accept any open position rather than exercise a preference for a more prestigious assignment.

White's (1970) vacancy chain theory, drawn from a study of movement among jobs for clergy, offers additional insight into the analysis of teacher reassignment that results from intra-district transfer. He found that a vacancy in one clerical position, through retirement or death, for example, set off a vacancy chain which would then create "the opportunity to move seized by the new incumbent, whose departure in turn generates a new opportunity, and so on" (p.16). Patterns of mobility are affected by the "overall structure of prestige and authority" within an organization (p.19). Jobs which are considered higher status and, therefore, more desirable, are usually well known to employees. White noted that while an organization may have an "implicit elite route" to higher status jobs, all employees must appear to have the same opportunities for mobility (p. 7). Newly-hired employees rarely move directly into the most prestigious jobs. Rather, employees transfer to more prestigious jobs when vacancies occur, resulting in a new vacancy which may also be filled by a

transferring employee, and so on. White found that "societal pressures and networks of acquaintance, information, and ideology" influence mobility inside organizations (p. 81). These findings comport with descriptions of the allocative structures which appear to guide the ways in which teachers typically move within a school district, i.e., transferring to a vacancy in a more prestigious location, resulting in a new vacancy which may also be filled by a transferring teacher, and so on. White's findings also appear consistent with studies of teacher mobility which indicate that schools serving higher income students are considered more elite, and therefore many teachers will use their acquired human capital to seek more desirable workplaces.

Taken together, these theoretical approaches help to provide a framework for examining the practices and policies associated with teacher transfer in urban public schools. Much previous research tends to emphasize the role of human capital and internal labor market conditions within the school district when analyzing intradistrict teacher mobility. Although individuals and groups, such as principals, school boards, central office personnel, and unions contribute to internal labor market conditions, their specific roles are not usually examined in these studies. Both the informal influence and formal policymaking roles of these actors contribute to the development of institutional rules which govern these internal labor markets; the research which follows examines their actions and relative influence.

Data and Methodology

This research into teacher transfer is part of a larger study of teacher allocation policy and practice in urban school districts. In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection for several reasons. First, it was hoped that one-to-one interaction might overcome some of the initial reluctance encountered when raising this topic. Second, the

relatively open-ended approach allowed respondents to emphasize the aspects of the issue which they believed to be most important and to describe them in their own words. Finally, the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews allowed opportunities to probe answers and to further explore assumptions and reasoning.

Using transcriptions of interviews for content analysis, general themes and perspectives of the interview informants were identified. Based on the findings of previous research, evidence was analyzed to identify both expected and unexpected patterns and themes. To allow comparisons of policy and practice on the socioeconomic dimension, data from participants speaking about both high and low poverty schools were analyzed along with district-level information. The main areas of inquiry were the impact of school poverty concentration, influence of school location and perception of safety, teacher union contract provisions, and other internal labor market factors. In addition, the relative influence of interested actors (for example., teacher unions, principals, and district office personnel) over teacher transfer issues is examined.

Four urban districts are included in this study: the North Harbor school system, located in a Northeastern central city; Cross City, a large metropolitan district in the Southeast; Raymond, a smaller Southeastern district; and Lakeview, a large Midwestern district. The North Harbor district is located in a large Northeastern urban center populated by a variety of racial and ethnic groups. As in most cities in the United States, there are enormous disparities in income among its residents. Neighborhood patterns of race and social status tend to be reflected in school enrollments. Cross City, a large Southeastern district, was desegregated some twenty years ago and currently has a metropolitan structure. The district has a large inner-city population as well as a number of schools which are characterized by a mostly low-

income, white student enrollment. The smaller Southeastern district, Raymond, although primarily urban, also enrolls some students from surrounding suburbs and a few rural areas. The Raymond district was nominally desegregated during approximately the same period as Cross City. It has, however, remained highly segregated by race. The Midwestern district, Lakeview, is an urban district surrounded by a number of middle- and upper-middle class suburban districts. Although the district has continued some busing, many schools now enroll students from their surrounding neighborhoods.

Interview respondents were chosen for their breadth of knowledge about the school districts chosen for the study. All respondents are long-term employees or residents (as in the case of professors, for example) of their districts. Administrators interviewed for this research were chosen based on their reputations as strong, effective leaders in their schools. This was, of course, a subjective determination. Recommendations from their peers played the primary role in the selection process. By choosing to interview administrators who are highly regarded among their peers and in their communities, it was expected that a clearer picture of the independent effect of concentrated poverty on staff mobility could be seen.

At the time the interviews were conducted, none of the districts used site-based management, and they did not offer teachers any formal role in personnel decisions. All four districts had policies that required hiring and placement of teachers by district-level administrators. However, the informal procedure within two of the districts, Raymond and North Harbor, is for teachers to first apply directly to the schools of their choice. Principals then communicate their preferences to the central office. It should also be noted that none of the districts has recently experienced any major reductions in force, a factor that can significantly influence teacher transfer.

Teacher union activity and strength varied considerably across the districts. In North Harbor and Lakeview, the unions were regarded as influential in setting policy and influencing practice. While influential, Cross City's union appears to play a less powerful role than its Northern and Midwestern counterparts. Raymond's weak teacher organization does not have a bargained contract.

Most interviews were face-to-face. A few were done by telephone, and one was completed by e-mail. The majority of interviews were conducted in the respondents' workplaces. The following questions were asked (with appropriate modifications for district-level respondents):

1. In thinking about retaining effective teachers, does the location of your school have any impact on your efforts?
2. Does the perceived safety of your school and the surrounding neighborhood have any influence on teacher retention in your school?
3. Do the kinds of students in your school have any relationship to your ability to retain quality teachers?
4. What impact do teacher union contract rules concerning seniority policy and transfer policy have on your efforts to retain effective teachers?
5. For principals: In thinking about formal and informal influences on retaining and transferring teachers, what do you believe to be the relative influence of district office personnel, the teacher union, and your own influence?
6. What efforts, if any, do you make to increase teacher job satisfaction? What other initiatives do you believe would be helpful in retaining quality teachers in your school?

Interview respondents include: 11 school administrators (3 secondary; 8 elementary); a former principal currently supervising student teachers at a major university; 5 district officials; 3 local union representatives; a former college of education dean; 4 college of education professors with personal knowledge of local district policy and practice; and an education specialist affiliated with local government. All informants were chosen, in part, because of extensive and varied experience in their local public schools. To provide a broader perspective on teacher transfer issues, interviews were also conducted with national-level representatives of both the NEA and AFT.

When attempting to collect data of this kind, there is difficulty with both access and candor. Informants with the necessary information and experience must be identified and their cooperation secured. Additionally, they must be willing to speak with sufficient candor about what many consider a potentially controversial topic. Respondents may not feel free to express openly and honestly their observations and opinions to an unknown researcher. Because of the sensitive nature of many of the questions to be raised and the initial reluctance of some respondents to be interviewed on this topic, they were assured of anonymity in all published materials. To further protect the participants' identities, schools are not identified by name and the names of all cities have been changed in the following report of the findings.

Results

Interview data provide evidence that the problem of teacher turnover in urban school districts is often more complex that the literature usually describes. Seniority-based transfer of teachers away from low-income schools is typically associated with union contract provisions. Internal labor market rules in both the Northeastern and Midwestern districts are largely governed by teacher union contracts, and transfer patterns generally operate as predicted by

earlier teacher mobility studies. However, the process of teacher transfer in the two Southeastern districts occurs in less expected ways. In the smaller Southeastern district, even in the absence of *any* contract provisions allowing seniority-based transfer, teachers regularly move from low to higher SES schools. District office personnel sometimes initiate these moves or grant informal requests from teachers.

The two Raymond administrators working in high poverty schools said that their district's transfer rules are not part of teacher contract provisions. As one explained: "The school board has a policy which basically says that it will announce any vacancy and post it in the schools. The board can fill the vacancy that day, or it can call it an 'administrative placement' and post notice of the vacancy after the fact. If a principal learns that a teacher is going to move to another school within the district, he or she can protest, but there is really little that can be done to influence that decision."

The experience of one principal of a low-income, minority school in Raymond illustrates the dilemma in that district. The promising new teachers assigned to his school are usually lost to higher status schools within a few years. When asked if he might have some examples of the difficulties in keeping good teachers in schools which serve many poor students, he quickly responded: "Oh, you mean teachers leaving here after they've learned how to teach?" He continued: "They have used these [low-income] schools as training grounds for teachers. I used to tell my supervisor that such-and-such a teacher is turning out to be really good and in May I would find out that teacher was being moved. I started to tease my supervisor, 'I'm going to stop telling you if a new teacher is good; you've got to find out for yourself.'"

In one recent year approximately half of the staff in this principal's school was made up of new teachers. He remarked: "It's a heck of a job to run a school while you're trying to

orient that many new teachers." Typically this principal does not receive any explanation when his teachers transfer. "At one point in my career," he said, "I would complain. When I finished, I would be told, 'We're still going to move that teacher.'" He added that schools "get stereotyped as being bad." The typical attitude is "everything is bad there and everything is good at [a nearby, more affluent, predominantly white school]. It is considered a promotion to get moved away from a poor, black school to an affluent white one."

Administrators in North Harbor consistently mention teacher transfer as a major aspect of the difficulties faced by high poverty schools in keeping their best teachers. The transfer policies of the teacher union are considered a primary contributor to the problem of retaining teachers in schools with large numbers of poor children. One North Harbor principal states the problem plainly: "Teachers often see transfer out of the inner city as a 'justifiable right,' and this has been institutionalized by the seniority system that allows teachers with five years' or more experience to apply to any school with an opening." Significantly, however, two of the principals in Raymond described similar problems in the absence of any union influence on teacher transfer.

The transfer system in North Harbor appears to offer little opportunity for low-income schools to rid themselves of their more undesirable teachers. A North Harbor principal of a high poverty school believes that the poor and minority schools in her district often have the most ineffective teachers because the "barely certified" teachers, who are more likely to be hired in these kinds of schools, will remain in place because they feel they cannot "make it" elsewhere. Regardless of their seniority status, they will not try to transfer away from those schools.

In North Harbor, not only do high poverty schools lose many of their most effective teachers to transfer, but the transfer policies also allow many of the system's marginal teachers to shift to their staffs. Some high poverty schools rarely get the opportunity to do their own hiring because vacancies are usually filled by transfers of unsatisfactory teachers who are hoping to avoid the demands of a more affluent parent group. Administrators of schools in desirable locations, even with large proportions of poor students, typically receive many transfer requests, often from teachers that they believe do not "fit" with their schools' philosophies and approach to teaching.

Because of the union seniority policy, North Harbor schools with vacancies are usually compelled to accept transfers. A principal of a high poverty school in an especially good location considers the transfer system detrimental to her efforts to build a cooperative staff with a shared sense of mission. Because her school is relatively small, there are few vacancies each year. For the past few years, she has had to fill all open positions with transfers rather than having the opportunity to hire teachers who are best suited for the school's program. She especially resents being unable to hire a few outstanding student teachers who would have liked permanent positions in the school.

School Location

Length of commute, especially in large urban centers, can be a powerful factor in the choice of workplace. As several interview respondents pointed out, teachers tend to be middle class and live in middle class neighborhoods. This is another way in which low-income schools are at a disadvantage in retaining teachers. A principal of one of the desirable and well-located schools in the North Harbor system said that she has tried to make the school "seem unattractive" to potential transfers. "I tell them about requirements like getting to

school early, meetings after hours, and the like. It may scare off some that don't want to work that hard. Some don't even call to find out anything about the school. Most just want the location."

An exception to that situation is a school in the North Harbor system with a middle- and upper-middle class enrollment located in a very affluent part of the city. The principal of this school indicated that she receives very few transfer requests. As the time of her interview, she had not received a request for transfer in more than three years. She believes that most teachers in lower status schools find her school's neighborhood "foreboding" and feel that the demands for performance from the school's "sophisticated parent group" would be too great.

Despite its urban setting, the Lakeview district is fairly compact and has a relatively low crime rate. As a consequence, school location appears to play a limited part in teacher transfer decisions. Interview respondents mentioned that special instructional programs and class size reductions in several schools in poor and working class neighborhoods have attracted experienced, skilled teachers.

"Bumping"

Because of seniority-based transfers in both North Harbor and Lakeview, sequential transfers, or "vacancy chains," are created as teachers with seniority "bump" newer hires in another location. All too frequently in North Harbor, these vacancies occur just before, or even after, schools open in the fall. The late notice of changes in personnel is especially difficult for principals who are attempting to make class assignments and other necessary decisions at the opening of school. There is often little time to orient new teachers to the school and to develop smooth working relationships among staff.

"Bumping" is particularly problematic if it results in the transfer of a teacher who is a poor "fit" in the school or is simply incompetent. This has been a problem for a Lakeview principal who works in a school, which serves many low-income students. Despite its enrollment and neighborhood, her school is "one everybody wants to bump into" because of its history of good leadership, a strong cadre of teachers, and special programs. This principal has used her contacts in the district human resources department to appeal to them not to send an unsatisfactory teacher to her school. Working within these informal channels has been successful in a few cases. Another Lakeview principal who has worked in desirable schools also uses informal procedures to try to keep ineffective teachers from transferring to his school. He explained his tactics this way: "I may contact the person, have lunch. I may call and talk about the school—and try to dissuade them."

Transfer as a Tool to Avoid Dismissal Procedures

Principals spoke of using various kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle persuasion to encourage unsatisfactory teachers to "move on," as one phrased it. For example, a teacher might be assigned an unwanted subject area or grade level or even moved to an undesirable location within the school building in an effort to encourage the teacher to transfer or quit. In an school with a strong cadre of teachers, North Harbor principal of an higher status school pointed out, an ineffective teacher can usually be counted on to "stand out." Sometimes that teacher will choose to apply for a transfer. Unfortunately, schools which are struggling to build a staff of quality teachers cannot depend on that strategy.

These informal procedures result in the "bouncing around" of ineffective teachers. Transfer practices in the Northeastern district help marginal teachers to stay in the system in at least two ways. First, teachers agree to transfer rather than receive an unsatisfactory rating by

their principals. Second, rather than attempting to dismiss unsatisfactory teachers, principals cut deals between themselves to exchange them. One principal of a low-income school said that he would be willing to take almost anyone just to get rid of a problem teacher. The most obvious negative consequence of these practices in urban schools is that ineffective teachers stay in the system rather than being dismissed from their jobs.

Schools with high concentrations of poverty in Raymond are also on the receiving end of transfers of marginal teachers, but, in this case, it is usually the district personnel office which is responsible. As a Raymond principal working in a low-income school observed, "Rejects, we get them." He described his school as a "dropping off place" for the system's worst teachers. The attitude of the district administrators has been, he said, to send teachers to the low-income, African-American schools "where [they] can survive." He acknowledged, "The feeling is if a teacher can't work here, he can't work anywhere. This is the last stop between now and trying to fire him, so we're just stuck with that teacher."

Interview respondents in Raymond believe that the district leadership considers poor, minority parents "powerless." One principal commented that district officials believe "that blacks don't care about education anyway and will take what they can get. . . .They are overlooked, voiceless." On the other hand, a Raymond principal who has worked in both affluent and high poverty schools pointed out that ineffective teachers are rarely sent to middle class, predominantly white schools because parents would object and create difficult conditions for the administration. Parents, he predicted, would be "on the teacher's back" and "create a disturbance in the school every day."

Once a problem in Lakeview, the exchange of marginal teachers now rarely happens because of rules governing evaluations. Teachers can be given an "out-of-sequence"

evaluation that allows administrators to circumvent the three-year evaluation cycle. Principals can use these additional evaluations to document unsatisfactory performance and to address problems immediately.

The Cross City Case

Only in Cross City were there few expressions of dissatisfaction with the district's transfer practices. The district operates under a mixed model which permits teachers to request reassignment without any specified length of service. Policies are in place which allow district office personnel and principals to agree before transfers are approved. When transfers are requested, official policy allows consideration of the balance of age, gender, length of service, experience in teaching, and race in the effected schools. According to a district official, liberal seniority-based transfer provisions in union contracts are often granted when districts are in poor bargaining positions due to budget constraints. The Cross City transfer policy resulted from intensive negotiation among principals, union officials, and district administrators. Efforts have been made on the district level to eliminate transfers away from inner-city schools. A principal is allowed to voice opposition to a teacher's request for transfer. If the district's personnel office "decides the transfer is unfair, it will be taken under consideration," an inner-city principal explained. A district administrator added, "If a case can be made, then the transfer is not automatic on the basis of seniority."

When asked about the low rate of teacher turnover due to transfer in Cross City, the district administrator offered several reasons. First, he noted that the number of transfers had leveled off after several years of high mobility following the implementation of the district's court-ordered desegregation plan. Second, he attributes the district's deliberate efforts to "cut down on the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'" in making the majority of schools

more attractive to teachers. He explained that district-level personnel "are able to divert things into high needs schools, a copying machine, some extra paper, a few more field trips." He went on to say, "I know one school that can make [several thousand dollars] in one day on a cheese sale. I know some other schools than can have a fund raising project and lose money." Going beyond equalization, the district has actively tried to see that available resources are distributed where needs are perceived to be the greatest.

Third, he has begun to see more teachers who "want to work in that location with that kind of student," meaning inner-city schools with large numbers of poor students. Fourth, a mentoring program that involves volunteers from area business has helped teachers "to see that kids progress despite the baggage they bring in every morning." Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he claims that there is a personal commitment to fairness from the head of the district and other highly-placed school officials. If fairness is not evident in such areas as building maintenance, for example, there are also community members who will demand action.

A former dean of education for a location university confirmed this assessment of conditions in Cross City. Describing the schools as "very well desegregated," he indicated that there have been efforts to provide special programs for schools with high concentrations of poverty. The district has made "efforts to enrich schools," with new money going to schools with the greatest needs. He also echoed the district official's claims of the concerns for disadvantaged students among the system's leadership. The dean described the local school board as "fairly liberal," with an interest in equity.

Influences on Teacher Retention

Because it can be so difficult to keep quality teachers in schools with large concentrations of poor students of color, it is important to know it there are rewards or incentives which have been found to be valuable in retaining effective staff members. Generally, interview respondents say that schools currently have virtually no effective means of holding onto teachers by the use of rewards. Principals working in low-income schools often stated that they believe that anything that allows teachers to feel more professional is important in building teachers' confidence and assuring them that they are respected for their knowledge and work. A North Harbor principal working in a low-income school explained that she tries "to do anything to facilitate their jobs, to take as much extraneous work as possible off of them and make few demands on their free time." Another North Harbor principal of a higher status school also maintained the importance of professional treatment of teachers. She makes a special effort to allow members of her staff to take time off to attend workshops and other professional develop opportunities. Ideally, she would like to give her teachers a period off each week to work with other teachers.

When asked about ways to improve teacher job satisfaction, a Lakeview administrator of a high poverty school replied that he tries to be well organized and brief at staff meetings to respect teachers' time. In addition, he stressed that he makes every effort to be supportive of teachers when confronted by unhappy parents. Despite limited funds, he also manages to provide meaningful professional development opportunities. Another Lakeview principal offered her "wish list" that she believes could help teacher job satisfaction. If her budget allowed, she would add technology and materials, provide additional space for conference room and offices, and schedule opportunities for teachers to discuss concerns together. A

school board member from the district pointed out that, though building-based budgeting is used, principals have too little discretionary money to provide much in the way of rewards, incentives, or extras for teachers.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note some limitations of this study. While the research provides insights into the problem of teacher transfer in urban school districts from a variety of sources, the cases and the interview respondents are nonrandom and limited in number. However, these districts were chosen to represent variation in size, location, governance structure, and teacher union influence. Similarly, interview participants provided a wide range of perspectives, from administrators and board members to union officials to professors knowledgeable about but working outside the systems.

Studies of teacher transfer often rely on quantitative data to examine inter- and intra-transfer patterns, and they provide expansive and important information on the issue. The limited numbers of interviews in this study do not allow for meaningful quantitative analyses. On the other hand, a small-scale study such as this provides an opportunity for exploration of the topic in an in-depth way. By giving respondents open-ended interview questions, a richer understanding of the dimensions of the problem can be reached. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners need more nuanced kinds of insights into the dynamic by which unequal allocation of teachers occurs. The in-depth interview data that are used in this study can help to inform the debate on ways in which policy changes can help to meet the needs of both students and teachers.

The findings of this research cannot be considered generalizable to all school districts. Interviews were done only in urban locations. Information on the problems of teacher transfer

in suburban and rural districts would provide a far more complete view of this topic. Further research should also include the missing voices of the teachers themselves. The perspective of teachers and their explanations of transfer decisions would enhance the understanding of the problem and could provide insights into ways in which policy should be developed to address it.

When investigating the policies and practices of teacher transfer in the future, it will be important for researchers to include the impact of school-based management, charter schools, and other forms of choice found in urban districts. Changes in policies regarding school governance and attendance rules could have a significant impact on teacher mobility within districts. Not only are they likely to influence seniority policy and union contracts, but they also can be expected to change the ways in which teachers will participate in personnel decisions within schools.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Policy

This article provides an empirical starting point for discussion by exploring the ways in which teacher transfer actually operates in urban school districts. Interview data provide evidence that the problem of teacher transfer is often more complex than the literature usually describes. Seniority-based transfer of teachers away from low-income schools is typically associated with union contract provisions. Internal labor market rules in the Northeastern and Midwestern districts are largely governed by union contracts, and transfer patterns in North Harbor generally operate as predicted by earlier teacher mobility studies. However, the process of teacher transfer in the two Southeastern districts operates in less expected ways. In the smaller Southeastern district, even in the absence of any contract provisions allowing seniority-based transfer, teachers regularly move from low to higher SES schools. District

office personnel sometimes even initiate these reassignments. On the other hand, Cross City's desegregation and its efforts to give special consideration to schools with the greatest needs appear to have contributed to a decline in the rate of transfer. Special programs and capable administrative leadership have helped a number of low-income schools in Lakeview retain staffs of experienced, well-qualified teachers.

More generally, the findings presented here suggest that transfers of quality teachers out and transfers of ineffective teachers in often interfere with efforts to offer meaningful staff development, to build a strong sense of mission, and to foster a collegial atmosphere among staff. Although most interview respondents noted that there are few rewards and incentives that can be offered to retain teachers, "professional treatment," respect for their time outside schools, and recognition of their accomplishments are important in increasing teacher job satisfaction.

Reforms to mitigate against the problems associated with teacher transfer away from high poverty schools would require a two-fold approach incorporating both comprehensive and more targeted reforms. First, the issue needs to be addressed in the larger context of teacher supply by a broad-based effort to increase the availability of well-qualified teachers, to see that they are placed and mentored appropriately, and that their skills continue to be developed. These issues currently occupy a prominent place on the educational policy agenda and have been extensively treated elsewhere (see, for example, Sack, 2000; Finkelstein, 1999; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Ingersoll, 1997, 1999; Haycock, 1998). To briefly summarize here, any comprehensive effort to make schools which serve large proportions of poor and minority students more attractive to quality teachers should address working conditions and resources levels. The literature on working conditions (for

example, Kozol, 1990; Schwartz et al., N. d.) indicates that teachers are often discouraged by the poor building maintenance, lack of adequate materials, and limited enrichment opportunities in low-status schools. Because school status and resource levels so often covary, it is also important to increase funding provided to low-income schools for these purposes.

Reallocation of resources within districts may require a conscious policy to educate various interested parties about the benefits of such change. As a Cross City district official pointed out, for these measures to be accepted in his system, it was necessary for the district leadership to explain the reasons for special efforts to aid low-status schools. Parents, community groups, and the teacher organization were brought into decisionmaking so that their interests could be weighed and their cooperation secured. It was necessary, in the words of an interview participant, for these groups to "have faith" that the district's funding decisions were beneficial and necessary.

Both the literature on teacher attitudes (Metz, 1987; 1990) and many of the participants in this research stress the importance of helping teachers to feel recognized for good performance. Because community perceptions influence the pride and satisfaction that teachers have in their work, efforts to further inform the public about the accomplishments of teachers and students in high poverty schools are yet another step in teacher retention.

For reforms more directly focused on the problem of teacher transfer, it will be important to foster cooperation among school-level administrators, district officials, and teacher organizations in an effort to reach agreement on ways in which teacher transfers can be less detrimental to high poverty schools. Calls for unions to pursue quality control in teaching by assuming roles in the hiring, evaluating, and dismissing of teachers and to support reform with

peer-review systems (see, for example, Kerchner, Koppich & Weeres, 1997; Bronner, 1998; Grant, 1999) are now coming from within the major national teacher organizations as well as from educational researchers and policymakers. While teacher unions continue to be criticized for their support of seniority-based transfer (Lieberman, 1997), evidence exists that they may become more amenable to cooperative efforts to regulate the granting of transfer requests. A Lakeview union official reported that the local teacher organization has proposed the development of school profiles that would better inform teachers interested in transferring about the schools in the district. The profiles would not only include school location and enrollment figures, but they would also provide information about the school's mission, philosophy, special programs, and even the principal's management style. Such profiles could encourage teachers to self-select into schools better suited to their talents and interests.

The example of Cross City described in this study shows that indeed it is possible to arrive at more structured agreements that help to protect the interests of all parties. Policy initiatives to address the difficulties associated with teacher transfer could also include a model, already in use in some districts (Keller, 1997; Krei, 1998), which brings together teachers and administrators to screen and approve transfer requests. In other districts, principals have adopted the unofficial practice of convening committees of teachers and community members to evaluate teacher transfer requests (Krei, 1998).

There is compelling evidence that increases in salary may help to attract more skilled and experienced teachers (Jacobson, 1989; Ferguson, 1991). Although so-called "combat pay" has a mixed record in attracting teachers to inadequately staffed schools (Bruno, 1982), proposals to offer bonuses to beginning teachers are currently under consideration in several states. Similar incentives could be offered to encourage experienced teachers to transfer to

high poverty schools. Measures to encourage effective, experienced teachers to stay in difficult-to-staff schools or to transfer there, either temporarily or permanently, (see, for example, Murray, 1992; Krei, 1998) have already been developed in some locations. These plans involve monetary incentives for experienced teachers willing to volunteer to work in schools that need quality teaching the most.

Because of the ways in which teacher transfer policies and practices are currently structured, schools which are most in need of experienced, effective teachers are often the least likely to retain them. With an additional understanding of the operation of the political actors and bureaucratic institutions which influence staffing in these settings, it is hoped that efforts may be undertaken to promote equity in the distribution of teacher resources in urban public school districts. While much remains to be learned about the ways in which resources impact the outcomes of schooling, most observers agree that access to quality teaching is an important element. Consequently, "it makes sense to concentrate on the variables most easily controlled and alterable by educators" (Boyd, 1989, p. 2). At the least, it is hoped that the evidence presented here will further inform the debate about ways to improve the schooling of economically-disadvantaged students.

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